

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Wendy Smith Allen from Milford Maine. I am the Restorative Justice Institute of Maines Young Adult Diversion Program, and Policy and Advocacy Lead, a coordinator for Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition and an organizer for Maine Recovery Advocacy Project. I am also a woman in long term recovery and rehabilitation from the criminal justice system and substance use disorder.

I am here today in full support of the amended version of LD 1552, An Act to Provide Re-entry Services to Persons Reentering the Community after Incarceration

Violations that send people back to jail also called Violating Conditions of Release, or Probation Violations, a class E offense are mind boggling. I, myself have been personally affected by these minor violations, resulting in a criminal record far worse than what it should be, causing more barriers for a successful rehabilitated life.

I was sent to jail many times for violations that never included new criminal charges. I was taken to jail for being 10 minutes late for a curfew, while trying to get home from a cancer treatment. I was left in a holding cell inside the jail for 13 days until I could see a judge, who thankfully released me, but only with a guilty plea. During this time, I lost my housing, and left to release to a homeless shelter, a wet shelter at that, meaning that people can come in while under the influence of substances. I was not only fighting for my life, but fighting for my recovery as well. This situation caused a relapse, and yet again another violation and trip to jail. This time, I spent over 30 days in jail before I saw a judge where I was sentenced to 90 days in jail to this class E violation. I was unable to receive my cancer treatment while inside, and once released had no place to live and had to go to a weekly motel in a high drug activity part of town. I no longer had a job, and struggled to pay 350.00 a week that the motel required. I did what I had to do to survive as I had to start my cancer treatments over again, and maintain this weekly rate as mandated in my conditions, having lost my job. This caused me to use survivor skills and go back to what I knew that I could do to make money, resulting is a lengthy prison sentence for picking up new charges. Having these minor violations result in high recidivism rates without any safety threats to the community, and prohibits those that are trying to rehabilitate to move forward. Those that have a violation of a dirty urine, should be offered treatment, not jail time. Sending someone to jail on these technical violations set people up to fail.

I am asking you all to please vote to pass this bill with the amendment.

Thank you,

Wendy Allen

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